United Nations
Office on Drugs and Crime

UNODC Research

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

WORLD DRUG REPORT 2025

KEY FIGURES AT A GLANCE
DRUG USE

People who use drugs, 2023

316
million people

↑ 28%
over 10 years

cannabis
244
million

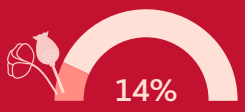
opioids
61
million

amphetamines
31
million

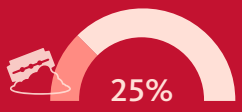
cocaine
25
million

"ecstasy"
21
million

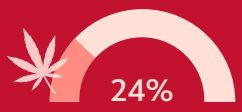
Women among people who use drugs, 2023



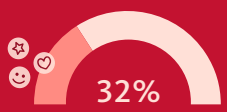
14%
opiates



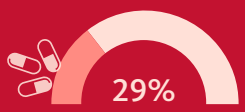
25%
cocaine



24%
cannabis



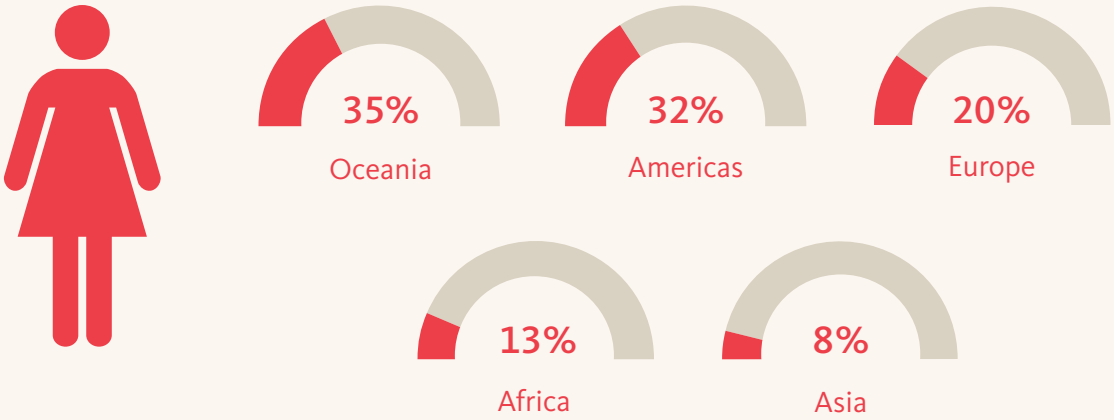
32%
"ecstasy"-type substances



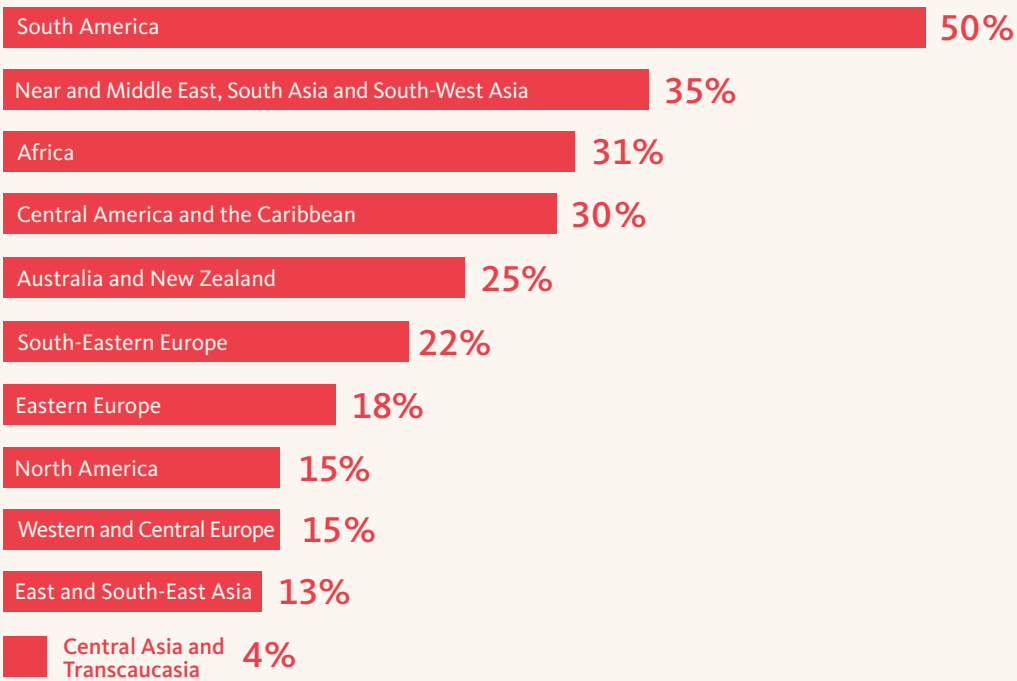
29%
amphetamines

KEY FIGURES AT A GLANCE
DRUG TREATMENT

Women in treatment, 2023



People under 25 years of age in treatment, 2023



KEY FIGURES AT A GLANCE
CULTIVATION AND PRODUCTION

Global cultivation

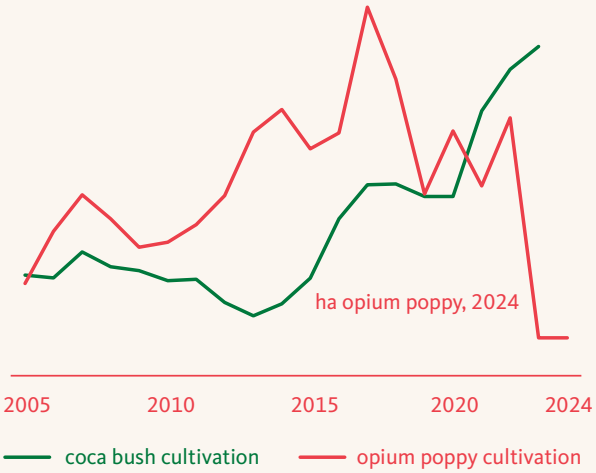
coca bush

6%
between 2022 and 2023

opium poppy

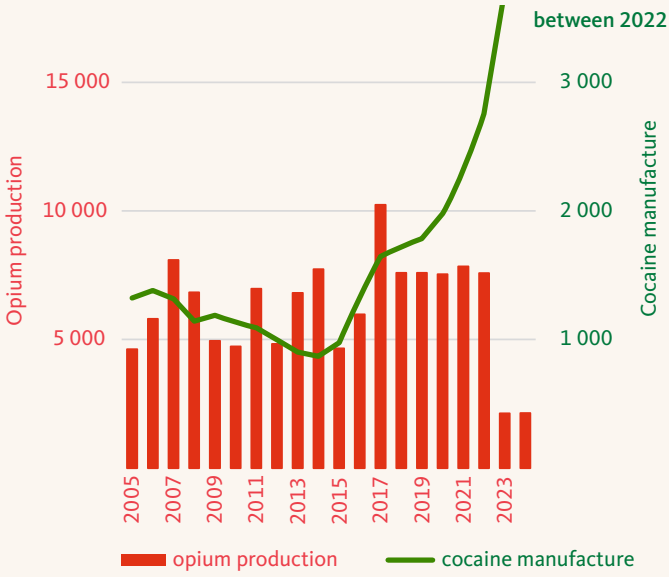
stable
between 2023 and 2024

ha coca bush, 2023
376 784



Global production

tons of pure cocaine, 2023
3 708 34%
between 2022 and 2023

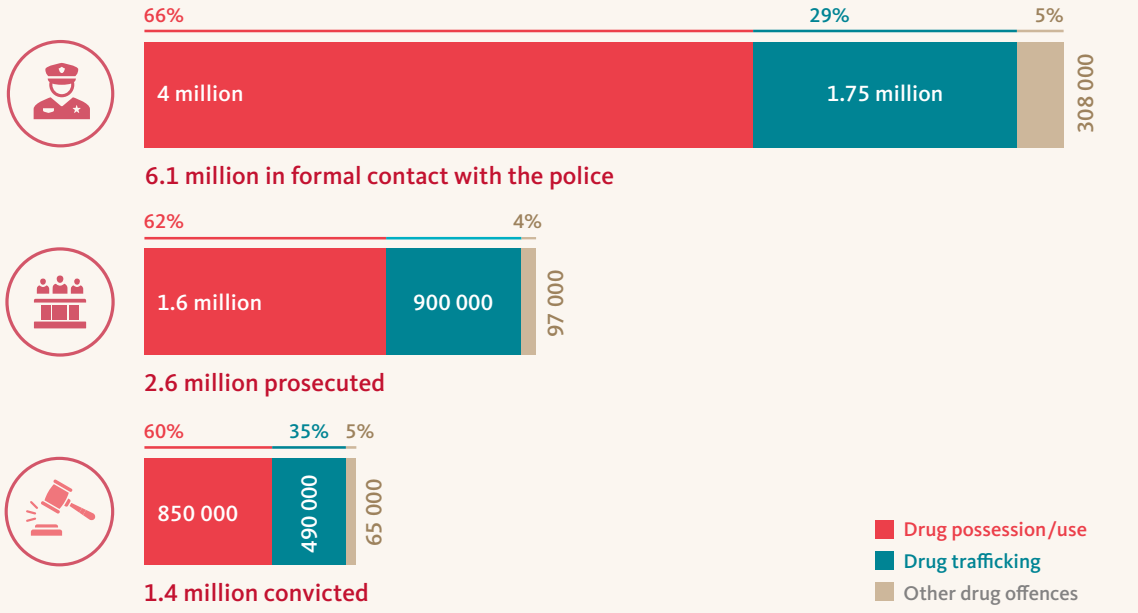


heroin production
193–211 tons (2024)

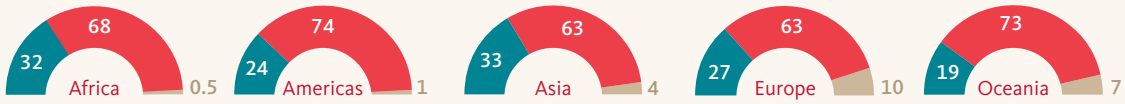
tons of opium, 2024
2 140 stable
between 2023 and 2024

KEY FIGURES AT A GLANCE
CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

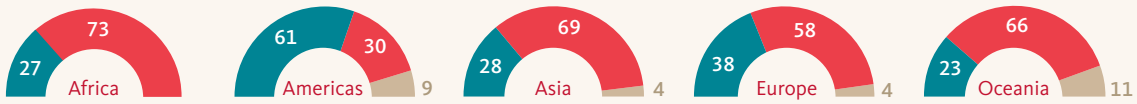
People in the criminal justice system for drug offences, 2023



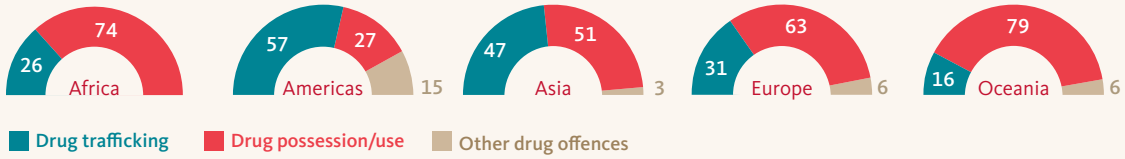
Percentage of types of drug offences among people in formal contact with the police, 2023



Percentage of types of drug offences among people prosecuted, 2023



Percentage of types of drug offences among people convicted, 2023



INSIGHTS

CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES

INSIGHTS: CHALLENGE

A new era of global instability is bringing unprecedented challenges to the drug problem

Global geopolitics have rarely been more tumultuous in the modern era. Conflicts in the Middle East, Myanmar, the Sudan and Ukraine show no signs of letting up. Post-conflict transitions in South-West Asia and the Near and Middle East, including in Afghanistan and the Syrian Arab Republic, and political transitions in West Africa are still vulnerable to instability. Latin America still suffers from the highest level of criminal violence worldwide, much of it caused by the drug trade, and Europe is now also experiencing intensifying rates of drug-related violence. Criminal groups controlling the drug trade across Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas are adapting quickly to broader geopolitical and economic changes, transforming their business models and practices to keep pace.

- Organized criminal groups make huge profits from drugs, and the drug trade is increasingly central to their business models. The cocaine market, the fastest-growing illicit drug market, is an arena of vicious competition between traffickers that brings startling levels of violence. While such violence has long been a problem in Latin America and the Caribbean, it is now spreading to countries in Western Europe, including as a result of the growing influence of organized criminal groups from the Western Balkans on cocaine trafficking from South America to Europe. Traffickers are also riding a wave of record production, pushing into new markets across Asia and Africa. Meanwhile, trafficking in opiates also continues to be lucrative. While there is a lack of more recent data, estimates made in the last few years indicate the level of the profits. Along the Balkan route, which originates in Afghanistan and passes through the Islamic Republic of Iran, Türkiye and South-Eastern Europe to reach Western and Central Europe, the estimated gross annual income from opiate trafficking was $15.5 billion between 2019 and 2022. The retail value of opiates trafficked along the route that runs from Afghanistan through Central Asia and the Russian Federation was estimated at about $10 billion annually between 2016 and 2019.

- The profits generated by the cocaine trade distort entire economies in some parts of Latin America, undermining economic investments and the well-being of communities. In some countries, illicit financial flows generated by the cocaine trade can reach levels comparable to those of the value of total national agricultural exports. In addition, the illicit opiate economy accounts for a significant portion of gross domestic product (GDP) in some countries. For example, in Myanmar, the total value of the national opiate economy in 2024 ranged between $589 million and $1.57 billion, or between 0.9 and 2.4 per cent of that country's GDP in 2023.

- Conflict and instability continue to offer fertile ground for the production and trafficking of synthetic drugs. "Captagon", an illicitly manufactured product usually containing amphetamine, continues to pose challenges in the Near and Middle East. "Captagon" came to the world's attention during the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, where most pills containing the drug originate. The end of the conflict in 2024 has cast uncertainty on the "captagon" market. Large seizures of "captagon" and the discovery of sites used for the manufacture of the drug in the Syrian Arab Republic have possibly disrupted the supply. But the latest seizure data for 2024 and early 2025 confirm the persistence of "captagon" flows in and out of the country. This suggests either the release of pre-existing stockpiles of the drug or its continued production under different conditions or locations.

- The war in Ukraine has disrupted established routes for heroin and cocaine, but the production and trafficking of synthetic drugs has expanded. Ukraine has become an important source of illicitly manufactured methadone. In addition, Myanmar and Mexico, where organized criminal groups are controlling entire communities, remain principal manufacturing hubs for methamphetamine, supplying the two largest markets: South-East Asia and North America.

- The impact of drug trafficking on governance and geopolitics along the supply chain depends on the structure, aims and modi operandi of the organized criminal groups that control it. The relationship between organized crime and the drug trade varies considerably across geographical areas. While some criminal groups specialize in drug trafficking, others earn revenues from a diverse portfolio of activities. Some groups focus on trade and are agile, prioritizing market transactions and the maximization of profit. Others focus on governance, tend to be hierarchical and seek to control territory or markets. They have

Cocaine trafficking flows departing the Americas as described in reported seizures, 2023–2024

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Final boundary between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined. Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties.

Note: Some transregional flows, before reaching their destination, connect with regional flows within the Americas.

Data Sources: UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform and Global Programme on Criminal Network Disruption/CRIMJUST.

INSIGHTS: RESPONSE

Tackling drug trafficking requires a deep understanding of the aims and structures of criminal groups

A more nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between the structures of organized criminal groups and the drug market will help the criminal justice system to disrupt criminal networks. While organized criminal groups help to shape drug markets, those groups also alter their structures and personnel in response to the market.

- Drug trafficking groups are largely unaffected by random or indiscriminate pressure, yet that type of enforcement is one of the most common. It often ensnares couriers, drivers and retailers, who represent the most exposed but also the most replaceable actors. Law enforcement authorities could have more impact by targeting those with specialized skills that are not so easily replaceable, such as mid-level managers, chemists and money-launderers. Law enforcement strategies must also take into account the terrorism-drug trafficking nexus.

- Mapping criminal groups can be used to highlight their vulnerabilities, key actors and enablers and pinpoint possible nodes for intervention, ultimately helping to dismantle networks and shrink illicit markets. For example, groups with high levels of member connectivity and decentralized decision-making are particularly resistant to indiscriminate law enforcement actions. In addition, the removal of the leaders of criminal groups by itself may not be effective in certain contexts and may result in unwanted outcomes. The killing or capture of a group's leader can increase violence and lead to fragmentation and competition, which can in turn multiply groups and make drugs cheaper, thereby increasing supply.

- Law enforcement authorities and the criminal justice system must be able to match the sophistication of the technology used in the drug supply chain. This includes acquiring new skills and proper equipment and maintaining adequate scientific testing and forensic capacity to identify new drugs and emerging demand- and supply-related threats. Artificial intelligence, unarmed drones, data and other technology can be harnessed for surveillance and for identifying chemical compounds. However, it is crucial to ensure that such technologies are used responsibly. Careful consideration needs to be given to human rights, and safeguards must be in place to prevent misuse.

- Law enforcement authorities should rigorously evaluate the impact and cost-effectiveness of seizures and other operations to ensure that they result in the destruction of trafficking routes rather than merely causing them to be displaced. This requires taking judicial action following seizures, as well as effective international cooperation, intelligence-sharing and the conducting of joint operations, particularly in border areas dominated by organized criminal groups.

- Weak maritime governance and corruption in ports offer opportunities to drug trafficking groups to move large volumes of drugs via maritime routes. Supporting coastal States in strengthening maritime law enforcement, improving cooperation and building legal frameworks is essential. Interdictions at sea and port controls, including through preventing corruption, are key tools to disrupt supply chains before they are adapted and routes are shifted.

- Law enforcement can affect the organizational form and composition of groups engaged in drug trafficking. The use of social network analysis can enhance strategies targeted at the disruption of overall operations or, alternatively, could force groups to adapt in ways that are less socially harmful. One proposed strategy is to publicly increase pressure on the most violent groups or those that engage in serious crimes through focused deterrence efforts.

- Criminal groups and market dynamics both need to be targeted in order to tackle drug trafficking. Market dynamics can be changed through demand or supply reduction interventions; but if the market remains unaffected, dismantling drug trafficking groups merely displaces their activities. Large-scale change in markets can offer opportunities to disrupt criminal networks. For example, the drastic reduction in the volume of opiates generated in Afghanistan is disrupting the business model of groups involved in

INSIGHTS: CHALLENGE

Socioeconomic vulnerability is expanding worldwide and increasing exposure to the drug problem

The tumultuous turn in global geopolitics has shaken financial markets and diplomatic relations and intensified conflict situations. Trade policy uncertainty is affecting businesses and long-term planning decisions. Such dynamics are creating new groups of vulnerable people, ranging from those who have lost their livelihoods in areas of industrial decline or increasing automation, to those across the Global South who are no longer able to obtain life-saving drugs. As more and more people flee hardship, instability and conflict, migration levels are surging in every global region. Many of these vulnerable groups will be at greater risk of turning to an illicit drug market that is diversifying and becoming increasingly effective. People in conflict zones and post-conflict settings face heightened risks of recruitment by both drug trafficking organizations and terrorist groups.

- The emergence of new groups of vulnerable people is particularly alarming because global estimates suggest that drug use has continued to rise. Vulnerable people are more likely to experience greater negative health and social impacts as a result of drug use. They are also more likely to progress to drug use disorders and to have more limited access to health and social services. In turn, drug use disorders make people who use drugs, their families and communities more vulnerable. The overall impact is shaped not only by the types of drugs used, how they are consumed and who is using them, but also by wider policy and cultural factors, such as the availability and accessibility of drug use disorder treatment and care services, and stigma. These factors overlap, combine and interact with each other.

- Because of the precarious stage of their physical and mental development, young people are more vulnerable to the harmful effects of drugs than the general population. Yet drug use among young people is at a level similar to or higher than the level of use among adults for most drug groups, according to the available estimates. Moreover, cocaine and other drugs are finding their way into new markets in emerging economies that have younger populations. While the global pattern is clear, there have been some exceptions at the regional level. In the case of cannabis, for example, the prevalence of use in 2023 was higher among the general population than among people aged 15 to 16 in Africa and North America.

- More men use drugs than women: about three quarters of people who use cannabis, cocaine or heroin are men. Yet women are more vulnerable to higher levels of harm once they initiate drug use. Women in general initiate drug use later in life than men, but once they do they tend to increase their consumption of different substances at a more rapid rate than men. Women also progress to drug use disorders at a more accelerated rate than men. In addition, women have a relatively higher risk of acquiring HIV and hepatitis C if they inject drugs. They also face a higher degree of stigma as a result of their drug use than men and face more barriers in accessing drug treatment and other related health services.

- While social and economic development is fragile across the globe and gaps persist in access to drug treatment and care services, the harms posed by drug use have continued to rise. The synthetic opioid fentanyl has made the headlines worldwide because of its central role in the health crisis in North America, where it is linked with tens of thousands of deaths each year. However, fentanyl is not common outside North America. Other synthetic opioids, particularly nitazenes, which can be many times more potent than fentanyl, have been linked to deaths across all continents. Already in 2023 and 2024, Member States reported more new nitazenes than new fentanyl analogues to UNODC. While synthetic opioids may be the deadliest synthetic drugs, amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) are the most widely used. Almost half of all global seizures of synthetic drugs in 2023 were ATS; in the same year there were an estimated 31 million global users of amphetamines and another 21 million global users of "ecstasy". The popularity of methamphetamine continues to grow, particularly in emerging markets.

- The control of pharmaceuticals is rapidly becoming a multifaceted challenge. While there is concern in some regions about the increasing amount of pharmaceuticals being diverted into the illicit market, the vast majority of people living in low- and middle-income countries have no access to controlled substances for

INSIGHTS: RESPONSE

Cooperation across sectors, agencies and countries is key to protecting the most vulnerable

Controlling the demand and supply of drugs while protecting the most vulnerable members of society requires a concerted effort across countries, agencies and sectors. The criminal justice system would be more efficient if resources were refocused on disrupting supply chains and criminal networks. As stated in the Outcome Document of the 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem, criminal justice systems should also explore alternatives to conviction or punishment for drug-related offences in cases of an appropriate nature. This is particularly relevant when cases involve people who use drugs, many of whom are in situations of vulnerability. The utility and availability of medicines containing controlled substances must be protected by developing appropriate regulations, strengthening health systems and preventing diversion and non-medical use.

- Addressing the drug problem while protecting the most vulnerable people and victims requires a concerted effort across drug agencies and other government bodies, institutions and other stakeholders, including civil society and people with relevant lived experience. Services provided by ministries of health, labour, education and social development can help to prevent drug use, support recovery from drug use disorders and reduce related harms. Law enforcement operations to dismantle illicit laboratories and cultivation sites should include elements of environmental protection. Cooperation with the private sector and the banking sector is essential for identifying suspicious financial transactions. Cooperation with the chemical industry is also vital for halting the diversion of substances and equipment into illicit drug manufacture. Setting up and strengthening professional networks in the health, law enforcement and criminal justice sectors, among others, facilitates the exchange of research and good practices and fosters trust among practitioners.

- The aim of the international drug control conventions is to balance the availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes with efforts to prevent the diversion of those substances for non-medical use. Practical steps to achieve this goal can include improving practices relating to medical prescription through appropriate guidelines and training, as well as monitoring by means of electronic prescribing systems and data-sharing among relevant agencies.

- The prosecution of people who use drugs and low-level criminal actors, who can easily be replaced in the supply chain, should be less of a priority for criminal justice systems. In addition, people who are trafficked and compelled to take part in the supply chain should be considered victims of crime. Strategic planning would allow resources to be allocated towards top-level targets and the groups critical to the drug trade. Improved analysis, international judicial cooperation, corruption reduction efforts and the development of skilled law enforcement and criminal justice professionals are key in that regard. More is required in terms of capacity-building; for example, there should be an emphasis on enhancing sensitivity to the above-mentioned issues among police officers, prosecutors and judges, and on increasing their capacity to investigate, prosecute and adjudicate in a more effective and proportionate manner by focusing on the most serious cases and using available tools and laws, including on non-custodial measures.

- While the impact of illicit drug cultivation and manufacture on the environment can be classed as relatively minor compared with other drivers of environmental degradation, there are few studies to rely on. Part of the environmental impact of synthetic drugs can be quantified by identifying the carbon footprint of each substance. To close knowledge gaps in this area, UNODC commissioned the first ever life-cycle assessment of a synthetic drug, focusing solely on 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA). Such an approach offers one way forward for researchers in the area, but more is needed to address current data gaps, such as those related to the environmental impact of pre-precursor and precursor chemicals and the long-term spillover effects of illicit drug use, cultivation and manufacture on biodiversity, the food chain and human health.

- Tailored trauma-informed treatment and care need to be available and accessible for people in conflict zones and humanitarian settings where the vulnerability to drug use and associated mental health disorders is particularly high.

INSIGHTS: CHALLENGE

Public health at risk: drug use, mental health and the fiscal squeeze

As macroeconomic conditions worsen and development aid shrinks, countries are struggling to sustain investments in public health — including in response to drug use. The lingering mental health impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic risks increasing the number of people who use drugs and those with drug use disorders even further. Yet, just when the need for investment is greatest, Governments are facing mounting debt, tighter budgets and growing pressure to cut spending. Low-income countries are especially vulnerable. With several high-income nations slashing their aid budgets, many in the Global South are being left without access to life-saving treatments, and overstretched health systems risk being pushed to the brink. Drug use disorders already impose a heavy toll on individuals, families and communities. Without sustained investment, the human and economic costs are likely to escalate — deepening inequality and undermining global health progress.

- The cost of failing to tackle drug use disorders can be measured by the number of deaths caused by those disorders, particularly overdose deaths. In 2021, the loss of nearly 28 million disability adjusted life years, as well as nearly half a million premature deaths, were attributed to the use of various drugs. Both figures have been rising for three decades and show that the drug problem is a major contributor to the global burden of disease.

- The link between mental health issues and drug use disorders is well known. The World Health Organization has warned that almost 1 billion people suffered from mental health disorders in 2019. Rates of common mental health conditions increased by 25 per cent after the COVID-19 pandemic. Substance use disorders were among the contributing factors. It has been reported that almost half of people with drug use disorders present with at least one psychiatric comorbidity. Conversely, high rates of substance use disorders have been reported among people with primary mental health disorders.

- A renewed interest in the therapeutic use of controlled psychedelic substances to treat a range of mental health disorders has sparked a wave of clinical trials, mainly in high-income countries. Results from the early stages of medical research have led to policy changes that have enabled access to psychedelics for "quasi-therapeutic" use in a few jurisdictions. While preliminary research has shown promising results in the treatment of some mental health disorders, the cultural movement around psychedelics has sparked an increase in their non-medical use, raising concerns about possible health harms.

- Most people with drug use disorders do not receive treatment and care. Only 1 in 12 people with drug use disorders were estimated to have received any form of drug treatment in 2023. Women are less likely than men to access treatment and care services. Globally, as indicated by limited sex-disaggregated data, 5.5 per cent of women with drug use disorders were in treatment in 2023, as compared with13.6 per cent of men with such disorders.

- In some regions, including Europe and North America, there are signs of an overall decline in the practice of injecting drugs and a move towards smoking them. This shift in habit may result, in the short term, in a decreased risk of blood-borne infections, abscesses and overdose. However, one study has shown that regularly smoking opioids and methamphetamine, or concurrently smoking and injecting methamphetamine, carries serious longer-term risks. Those include more frequent drug use, increased severity of dependence, risky sexual practices that could lead to HIV and hepatitis C, and psychiatric comorbidities.

- Drug use and drug use disorders can affect the physical and psychological well-being of the family members of people who use drugs, as well as their social and economic situation. These phenomena can also result in social stigma and shame related to drug use in the family. People with drug use disorders are much more likely to be the victims, and perpetrators, of violence than the general population.

INSIGHTS: RESPONSE

Mainstream health systems must be supported by financial and political commitments to reducing the impact of drug use disorders

Health systems must be supplied with the resources and tools needed to provide scientific evidence-based, quality interventions. If such interventions are made more widely available and accessible, they can mitigate the negative health and social impacts of drug use and drug use disorders. Such interventions must be age- and gender-appropriate and include efforts to prevent drug use and to provide treatment and care to those with drug use disorders, as well as measures that support long-term recovery and reduce wider negative effects. The absence of such interventions or the limited coverage and low quality of some existing interventions is not only harmful to the individuals in need of treatment but the impact of their drug use may also worsen.

- People who inject drugs constitute one of the main drivers of new HIV and hepatitis C infections. Such new infections are further driven by structural and economic inequalities, harmful sociocultural norms, gender-based inequalities and gender-based violence. Interventions known to be effective in tackling these issues – including needle and syringe programmes, opioid agonist maintenance therapies and other interventions that can minimize the health and social consequences of drug use, such as those related to overdose management (e.g. access to naloxone) – require appropriate political and financial commitments.

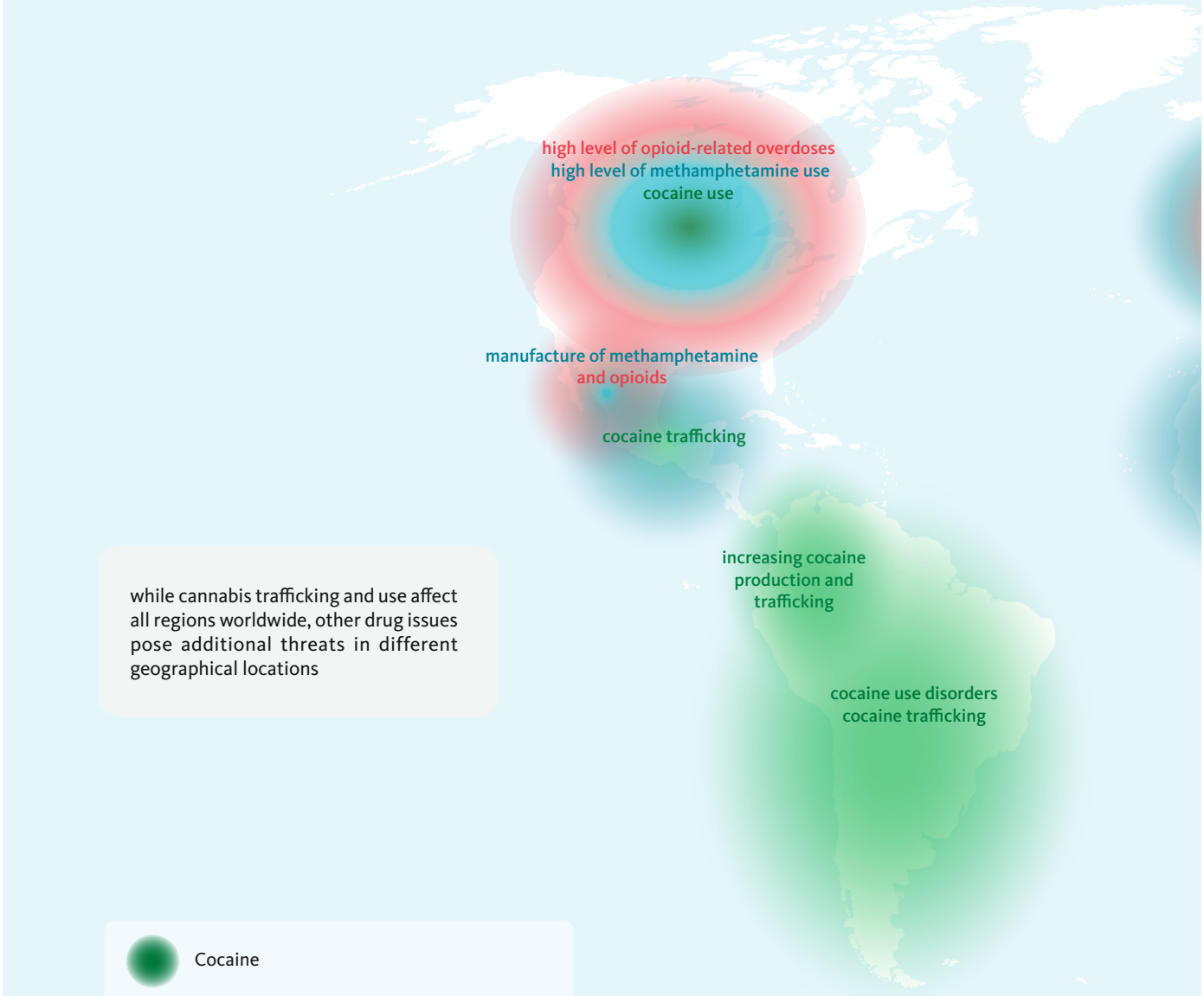
- Pharmacological treatments primarily target opioid use disorders and should be administered alongside psychosocial interventions. While there is no effective pharmacological treatment for stimulant or cannabis use, other effective, evidence-based treatment and care interventions are available for other drug use disorders. Psychosocial interventions such as cognitive behavioural therapy, motivational interviewing and contingency management play a crucial role in comprehensive care. These interventions, integrated across the continuum of care, have demonstrated effectiveness in decreasing drug use and improving quality of life, while decreasing crime, violence and recidivism.

- Evidence suggests that integrating drug use disorder treatment and care into existing healthcare systems improves the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of that treatment and care. Such integration requires, among other measures, that a sufficient number of health professionals be trained and equipped with the necessary tools, which is not a simple task, particularly in systems already hampered by a struggle for resources. In Africa, for example, only 3.4 per cent of the estimated number of individuals with drug use disorders receive treatment. To strengthen evidence-based treatment, Governments must prioritize cost-effective interventions based on public health principles.

- To reduce the burden on health systems and the possibility of negative health and social consequences for people who use drugs and people with drug use disorders, resources should also be pushed into evidence-based prevention programmes at the policy and legislative levels. Such programmes are effective in preventing drug use, as well as many other risky behaviours. Prevention systems should support the healthy and safe development of children and youth through family skills, socio-emotional learning and opportunities to lead healthy lifestyles.

- There are many barriers to the provision of effective treatment and care for drug use disorders. Chief among them is the very limited availability of evidence-based services. Some people with drug use disorders do not recognize their need for treatment, and others are unwilling to seek treatment owing to fear of stigma and discrimination. Women often face additional barriers, such as double stigma, expectations about their social roles and responsibilities, fear of legal sanctions, lack of childcare support and fear of losing custody of their children while in treatment. Better policies, the strengthening of health and social systems and services, education and outreach are needed to tackle these issues.

THE WORLD DRUG PROBLEM
COMMON CHALLENGE, LOCAL DYNAMICS



while cannabis trafficking and use affect all regions worldwide, other drug issues pose additional threats in different geographical locations

- Cocaine
- Opioids/Opiates
- ATS and NPS
- HIV among people who inject drugs

DRUG-BY-DRUG DEVELOPMENTS IN BRIEF

	Demand	Supply	Key issues
CANNABIS	› Cannabis remains by far the world's most commonly used drug › An estimated 244 million people used cannabis in 2023, representing 4.6 per cent of the global population aged between 15 and 64 › The number of people who use cannabis has increased by 34 per cent over the past decade › Cannabis use remains highest in North America, where 20.2 per cent of the population aged between 15 and 64 used the drug in 2023 › Cannabis remains the main drug of concern for 37 per cent of people in treatment in Oceania and 32 per cent of people in treatment in Africa › In the past year, while globally cannabis was used by 2.3 per cent of women aged between 15 and 64, it was used by 7.0 per cent of men in the same age range	› Following a long-term upward trend that continued until 2020, seizures of cannabis resin dropped in 2021 and even more so in 2022 but increased again slightly (by 5 per cent) in 2023, although remaining clearly below the peak reported in 2020. In contrast, seizures of cannabis herb decreased slightly in 2023, following moderate fluctuations at a high level between 2020 and 2022 › The limited information available in North America and Western and Central Europe suggests that the cannabis products on the illicit market have become more potent, with increased levels of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) over the past three decades. More potent strains have also emerged in Latin America	› Cannabis accounts for a substantial share of drug-related harm globally, owing in part to its high prevalence of use: an estimated 42 per cent of drug use disorder cases worldwide are cannabis use disorders (2021). In 2023, 41 per cent of countries reported it as the main drug of concern for people in drug treatment › There is evidence of the effectiveness of cannabinoids in treating a few conditions, but for many other conditions the evidence is limited. Many countries have made provisions for the medical use of cannabis, but the regulatory approaches differ widely between those countries › As at December 2024, Canada, Uruguay and 28 jurisdictions in the United States of America had enacted legal provisions allowing the production and sale of cannabis for non-medical use. Other legislative approaches have also emerged recently in other countries, especially in Europe, with varying degrees of regulated access to cannabis for non-medical use. Germany, Luxembourg and Malta have regulated access by adults to non-medical cannabis. However, a commercial supply chain for cannabis for non-medical use has not yet been established in these countries
OPIOIDS	› An estimated 61 million people used opioids in 2023, representing 1.2 per cent of the global population. Half of those were in South Asia and South-West Asia › Of those using opioids in 2023, an estimated 30 million used opiates, mainly heroin. This translates into 0.57 per cent of the global population aged between 15 and 64, or 0.16 per cent of women and 0.96 per cent of men in that age group › The global level of opioid use remained relatively stable from 2020 to 2023, after having increased slightly between 2017 and 2019 › One third of all people in drug treatment in 2023 cited opioids as their primary drug of use according to data available from 135 countries › Opioids remain the most lethal group of drugs, accounting for approximately two thirds of deaths related directly to drugs (mostly overdoses)	› The global area under opium poppy cultivation and opium production remained low in 2024, although slightly higher than in 2023, when illicit cultivation fell by 70 per cent and production by 74 per cent compared with 2022, mainly as a consequence of a 95 per cent decline in production in Afghanistan due to the Taliban opium ban of April 2022 › Myanmar remained the world's new largest producer of opium in 2024, accounting for almost half of the global total › There are starting to be signs of a shortage of opiates in some countries supplied by Afghan opiates. Nonetheless, in 2023 the Balkan route remained the main trafficking route for opiates, reflecting the continued existence of opiate stocks in and around Afghanistan › There has been a long-term upward trend in the quantities of pharmaceutical opioids seized, with some fluctuations since 2010 and a continued rise in 2023 › The illicit manufacture of and trafficking in methadone is affecting illicit markets, particularly in Eastern Europe	› Although opioid use has been stable in recent years, the two developing epidemics of the non-medical use of opioids, one related to fentanyls in North America and the other to the non-medical use of tramadol in North Africa, West Africa, the Near and Middle East and South-West Asia, continue to pose significant health risks, although overdose deaths in North America have started to decline › The dramatic decrease in opium production in Afghanistan in 2023 is likely to affect consumer markets beyond the region if enforcement of the ban is sustained over time. A looming risk is the potential replacement of heroin with synthetic opioids, including nitazenes, which are highly potent (exceeding, in many cases, the potency of fentanyl); they have been spreading rapidly in different regions of the world in recent years › The availability of pharmaceutical opioids for pain management and palliative care continues to vary considerably between low- and middle-income countries and high-income countries. Availability in low- and middle-income countries has been increasing, but the gap between them and high-income countries remains massive

DRUG-BY-DRUG DEVELOPMENTS IN BRIEF

	Demand	Supply	Key issues
NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES (NPS)	› Based on the limited data available, the level of use of new psychoactive substances (NPS) remains considerably lower than that of drugs under international control › Some people use NPS unknowingly, consuming them as adulterants or in place of other drugs. This can have fatal consequences for individuals, but in aggregated terms, harm related to NPS (in terms of deaths and hospitalizations) remains considerably lower than for controlled substances › The limited data available suggest that the most commonly used NPS are synthetic cannabinoid receptor agonists ("synthetic cannabinoids") and ketamine, followed by synthetic cathinones › NPS being used by groups of people in the general population include semi-synthetic cannabinoids, such as delta-8-THC in North America and hexahydrocannabinol (HHC) in Europe	› A total of 78 countries reported seizures of synthetic NPS in the period 2019–2023, thus exceeding the number of countries reporting seizures of plant-based NPS. Seizures of synthetic NPS in the period 2019–2023 were rather small and most commonly involved ketamine, followed by synthetic cannabinoids and synthetic cathinones › The number of different NPS on the market declined further, from 609 substances in 2022 to 527 in 2023, of which 56 were identified for the first time. Most NPS on the market were synthetic cannabinoids, followed by synthetic cathinones, synthetic opioids and hallucinogens › Declines on a year earlier were reported for almost all categories of NPS. While the number of fentanyl analogues on the market declined sharply between 2022 and 2024, nitazenes, another group of synthetic opioid NPS, have increasingly emerged on the market	› Control systems have succeeded in containing the spread of NPS in high-income countries, but the geographical reach of NPS trafficking has expanded › In some subregions, such as Eastern Europe and Central Asia, NPS (notably synthetic cathinones) have become a major problem › The supply and use of ketamine, which is still among the most used drugs in East and South-East Asia, have started to spread to several other subregions, including Western and Central Europe and Australia. The drug is used both on its own and as part of drug mixtures, the content of which is largely unknown to users › A worrying new trend in recent years has been the spread of nitazenes, which are a group of potent synthetic opioids, in many regions, especially Europe and North America, where they had been responsible for hundreds of deaths by the end of 2023, but also in Oceania and possibly Africa, where they are allegedly added to some of the smoked mixtures known as "kush"

REGION-BY-REGION DEVELOPMENTS IN BRIEF

	Demand	Supply	Key issues
AMERICAS	› Opioid use in North America remains high, with 2.5 per cent of the adult population reporting past-year use (8 million users) in 2023 › South and Central America and the Caribbean are the subregions with the highest proportion of people in drug treatment owing to the use of cocaine products worldwide, and are the subregions with the largest variety of cocaine products available on the market › Non-medical use of pharmaceutical stimulants is higher in the Americas than in other regions. More women than men reportedly misuse pharmaceutical stimulants › There has been a significant increase in the number of people in treatment for methamphetamine use disorder in North America over the past decade, most recently in Mexico › The prevalence of people who inject drugs in North America is high, with 1 per cent of the adult population (3.5 million people) estimated to have been injecting drugs in 2023; however, the estimated prevalence of HIV among people who inject drugs (nearly 7 per cent) is well below the global average	› Interceptions of cannabis have been declining substantially in North America despite a rapidly growing cannabis market › The manufacture of cocaine in South America reached a new record high in 2023 of 3,708 tons (pure cocaine) › Cocaine seizures have shifted closer to production sites in South America, where total quantities seized are now four times as large as those in North America › Most of the methamphetamine manufactured in North America is for consumption within the subregion › North America accounted for more than 99 per cent of all fentanyl and analogues seized worldwide in the period 2019–2023; the quantities seized continued to increase, reaching a new record high in 2023, although the annual rates of increase are slowing down › Strains of highly potent cannabis have emerged in Latin America over the last decade	› The opioid epidemic related to illicitly produced fentanyls in North America had been driving the number of overdose deaths to record highs. Since August 2023, there has been a reversal in this trend, with numbers declining for the first time in a decade. Overdose deaths dropped by nearly a quarter between October 2023 and September 2024 › The gender gap in cannabis use is closing in North America, where the level of use of the drug is particularly high › The Americas are affected by increasing cocaine trafficking, with record levels of manufacture of the drug in South America, where high levels of criminal violence are linked to such trafficking
ASIA	› Over half the estimated number of people who use opioids globally are in Asia (representing 1.1 per cent of the region's adult population), with the prevalence of opioid use in 2023 in the Near and Middle East/South-West Asia being one of the highest worldwide (3.5 per cent) › Methamphetamine is the main drug of concern in East and South-East Asia, whereas opiates, in particular opium and heroin, predominate in South-West Asia and South Asia, and "captagon" prevails in the Near and Middle East › Methamphetamine use has risen in Afghanistan and other countries in South-West Asia in recent years › The non-medical use of pregabalin has also been reported in the Near and Middle East › East and South-East Asia has a long-established market for the non-medical use of ketamine › The gender gap in cannabis use in Asia is the largest globally; 90 in every 100 people who used cannabis in the past year were men › Asia accounts for the largest number of people who inject drugs worldwide (5.2 million in 2022) and, within that group, of those living with HIV (615,000) and hepatitis C (2.8 million). The highest prevalence of HIV among people who inject drugs is in South-West Asia (29.5 per cent) and of hepatitis C in East and South-East Asia (65 per cent)	› The implementation of the April 2022 ban on opium production in Afghanistan has led to a dramatic decline in the cultivation and production of opium, and Myanmar is now the world's largest producer of the substance › The quantities of heroin and morphine seized declined across Asia by 34 per cent in 2023. Stocks related to Afghan opium production in previous years – although diminishing – are still supplying much of the heroin traditionally originating in Afghanistan › "Captagon", mainly manufactured in the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon, remains one of the drugs of major concern in the Near and Middle East. The long-term impact of the political changes in the Syrian Arab Republic on the global "captagon" market remains to be seen, although recent large seizures in neighbouring countries suggest that trafficking is ongoing, probably as a result of the release of existing stocks › There are indications that methamphetamine manufacture has increased in Afghanistan in recent years › There is substantial manufacture of methamphetamine in East and South-East Asia, with seizures reaching historically high levels in 2023 › Cocaine seizures suggest a geographical expansion in the trafficking of cocaine to Asia in recent years, with the quantities seized in 2023 reaching the second highest level ever recorded in the region › Large cocaine seizures made outside Asian countries but destined for those countries suggest that more cocaine may have been destined for countries in Asia than what was actually seized by Asian countries. While also occurring in other regions, this seems to be more pronounced in Asia	› A drastic shortage of Afghan heroin in consumer markets has not yet been reported, although some signs of price increase have started to be noted. There is a risk that a shortage in heroin will lead to it being replaced by more harmful substances, such as some synthetic opioids (e.g. nitazenes) that are significantly more potent than heroin and could lead to an increase in overdose deaths › The illicit manufacture of and trafficking in methamphetamine are expanding in South-West Asia and the Near and Middle East › The drug markets in Central Asia and Transcaucasia are characterized by a number of synthetic drugs, some of which are internationally controlled (such as methamphetamine and mephedrone) and some of which are not (certain other synthetic cathinones) › The non-medical use of tramadol and its trafficking may extend to the Near and Middle East and Central Asia and Transcaucasia › South-West Asia has one of the highest levels of prevalence of opioid use and of people who inject drugs living with HIV in the world

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UNODC Research

A global reference on drug markets, trends and policy developments, the *World Drug Report* offers a wealth of data and analysis and in 2025 comprises several elements tailored to different audiences. The web-based **Drug market patterns and trends** contains the latest analysis of global, regional and subregional estimates of and trends in drug demand and supply in a user-friendly, interactive format supported by graphs, infographics and maps. **Key findings** provides an overview of selected findings from the analysis presented in **Drug market patterns and trends** and the thematic chapters of **Contemporary issues on drugs**, while **Special points of interest** offers a framework for the main takeaways and policy implications that can be drawn from those findings.

As well as providing a comprehensive overview of global drug trends, the *World Drug Report 2025* features a focused analysis of the following drug-related topics in the three thematic chapters:

» **The nexus between drugs and organized crime.** This chapter explores the relevance of drug trafficking for organized criminal groups and the different organizational structures of groups that define their strengths and weaknesses. It calls for an end to indiscriminate law enforcement operations and for investment in more effective law enforcement responses to drug trafficking that are tailored to the specific aims and structures of criminal groups.

» **The environmental consequences of illicit drug markets.** This chapter addresses not only deforestation and land degradation linked to drug crop cultivation, but also the dumping of toxic waste, water pollution and chemical contamination resulting from synthetic drug production and trafficking, with a focus on Europe.

» **The complex and layered impacts of drug use.** This chapter looks at the effects of drug use on individual health and family and community well-being, and emphasizes the importance of social and health-oriented interventions that can prevent, interrupt or mitigate pathways of harm.

The *World Drug Report 2025* is aimed not only at fostering greater international cooperation to counter the impact of the world drug problem on health, governance and security, but also at assisting Member States in anticipating and addressing threats posed by drug markets and mitigating their consequences.

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